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ABSTRACT

A Minnesota study examined the secondary school dropout problem from the perspective of both the education system and the employment/training system. Findings from a pilot study involving 24 public secondary schools and the 24 counterpart Comprehensive Employment and Training Act agencies were compared with information from national and state studies and data sources. Urban areas were found to have the highest dropout rates. Eleventh grade was the peak year for dropping out. Dropouts (1) had lower occupational aspirations than their peers: (2) had higher unemployment rates: (3) earned less future income: (4) had lower reading, achievement, and achievement motivation levels: (5) participated less often in extracurricular activities: (6) had high levels of school absenteeism, school failure, and grade retention: (7) viewed school negatively: and (8) more likely had experienced some form of trauma. Characteristics of successful programs for dropouts included a personalized/individualized approach, basic skills remediation, preparation for employment, support services and counseling, paid work experience, community-based learning experiences, and credit toward high school graduation. (Recommendations for local, state, and federal systems comprise approximately one-half of the document. They relate to programs, funding, cooperation, and technical assistance.) (YLB)

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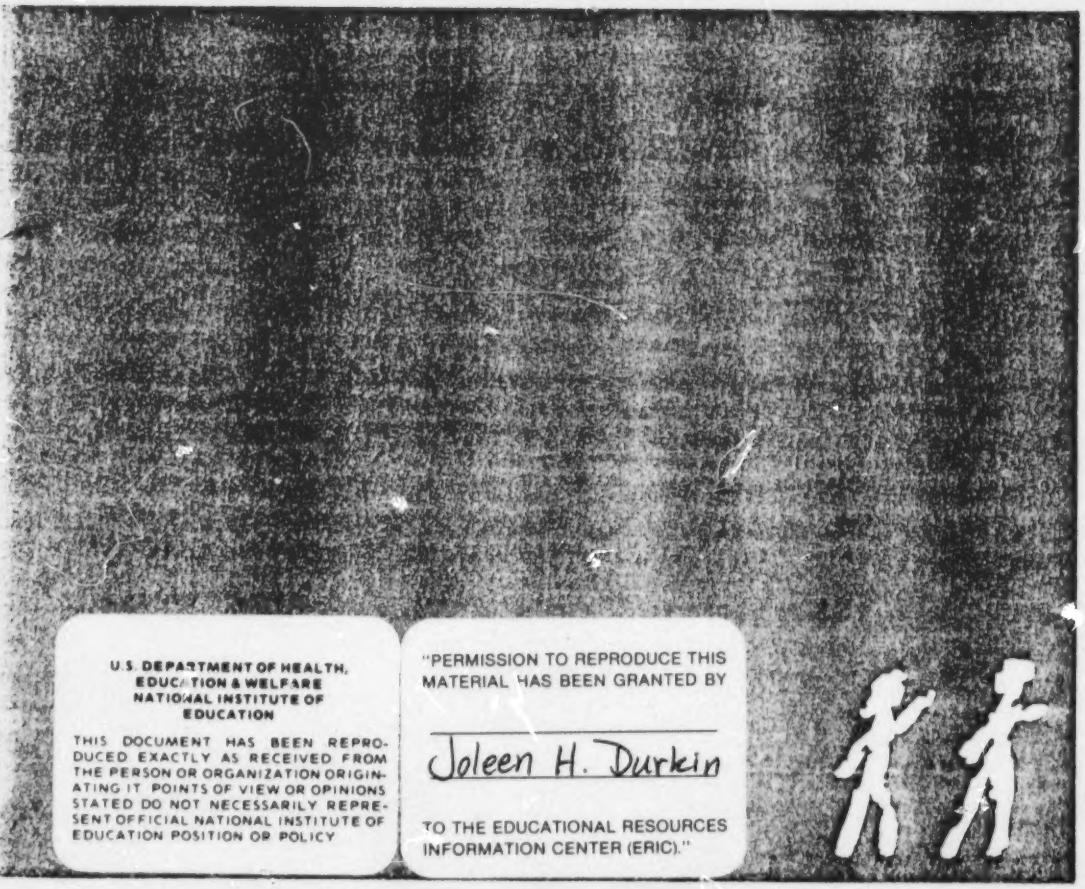
Secondary School DROP OUTS



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Executive Summary

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Introduction

Minnesota CETA Prime Sponsors and Minnesota schools have long been concerned about the problems faced by out of school and dropout prone youth. As cooperation between the education and employment/training systems intensified during the late seventies, the problems of these two groups of youth began to be seen in a common light. When staff from the two systems discussed common client groups, differing information about dropouts and varied perceptions about effective programs emerged. The need for a study to consider the varied viewpoints became apparent. As a result, dropouts and potential dropouts, with emphasis on both their educational and employment/training needs, became the focus of this study.

This study addressed the interest that has been voiced in the dropout problem by the education community and the employment/training community in Minnesota. The study included:

- Analyzing dropout numbers and rates; examining factors associated with leaving secondary school before graduation.
- Identifying and describing programs and activities which meet the educational and/or employment needs of dropouts and potential dropouts.
- Planning and completing a pilot study involving 24 public secondary schools and the 24 counterpart Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) agencies.
- Preparing recommendations on the basis of the findings in the study.

Who are the Dropouts?

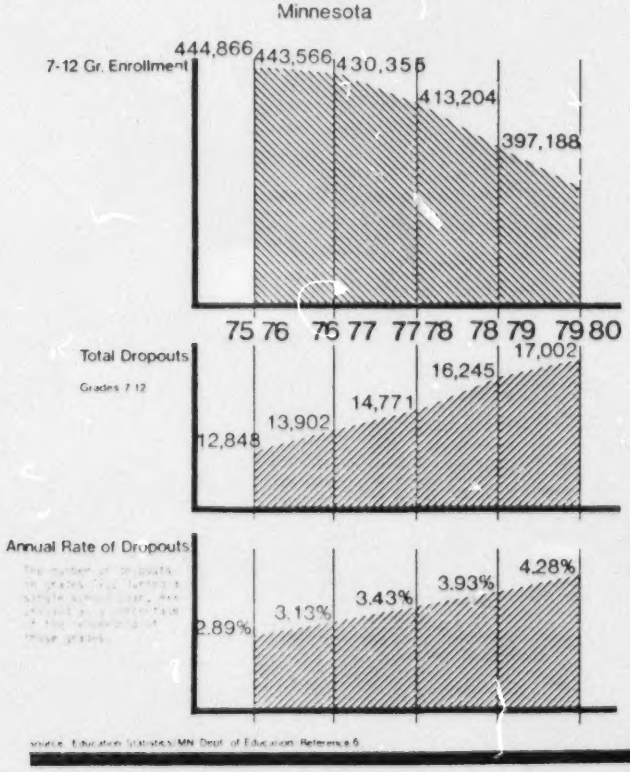
Understanding the scope and nature of the problem of dropping out of school can be useful to policy makers and program planners. Information from national and state studies and data sources has been compared with findings from the pilot study. The findings follow.

The number of dropouts in Minnesota has increased each year for the past five years.

- In 1975-76, over 12,800 secondary students dropped out of public schools.

Figure 1

Comparison of Enrollment and Dropouts

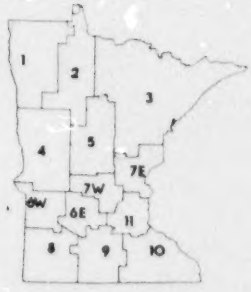


source: Education Statistics MN Dept. of Education Reference 6

Figure 2

MN. Public Secondary School Dropouts, Grades 9–12

byPlanning Regions in 1979/80



PLANNING REGION	NUMBER OF DROPOUTS	DROPOUT RATE	PLANNING REGION	NUMBER OF DROPOUTS	DROPOUT RATE
Region 1	269	3.6%	Region 7E	540	6.7%
Region 2	313	6.1%	Region 7W	654	3.7%
Region 3	1,315	5.4%	Region 8	20	2.0
Region 4	471	3.4%	Region 9	545	3.7%
Region 5	466	4.5%	Region 10	1,165	4.1
Region 6E	295	3.5%	Region 11	9,856	7.9
Region 6W	108	2.3%	State's Totals	16,172	5.8%

source: Education Statistics Section/MN Department of Education; Reference 6

Note: The dropout rates included on this page are based on grades 9-12 and are different from the grades 7-12 rates listed elsewhere.

By 1979-80, the number had increased to over 17,000. During the same period of time the secondary enrollments have declined from about 445,000 to about 397,000. Refer to Figure 1.

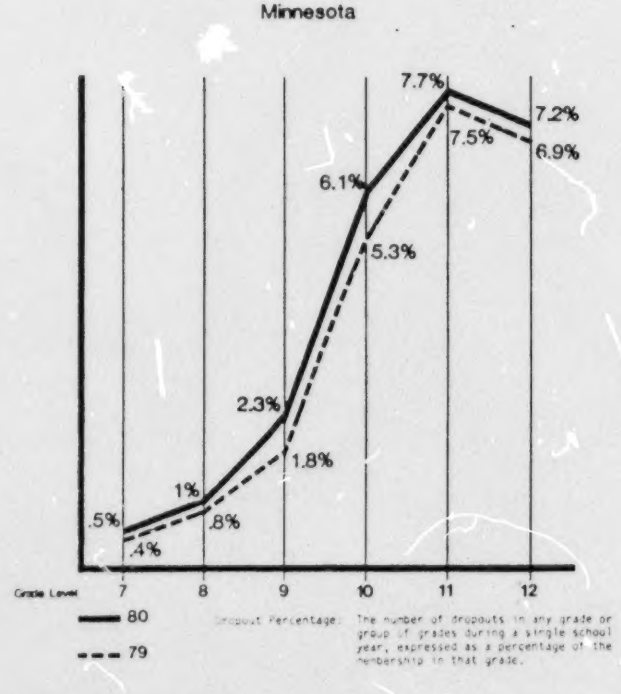
- When school district data are reported regionally, urban areas (Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth) have the highest dropout rates; Twin Cities suburban (Ramsey, Hennepin, Anoka, Carver, Scott, Washington and Dakota Counties) areas have the second highest rates.

- When dropout rates are reported regionally, the highest rates are in the Twin Cities Economic Development Region (Region XI) and in Northern and Eastern Minnesota Regions (Regions II, III and VIIE). Refer to Figure 2.

- Numbers of dropouts in the pilot study are consistent with statewide data. Dropouts comprised about 2.4 percent of the total enrollment in the pilot study schools. This rate is not surprising for the five month period of the study because statewide data for the full 1979-80 school year reflect a 4.28 percent dropout rate.

Figure 3

Rates of Dropouts by Grade Level



source Education Statistics/MN Dept of Education Reference 6

A wide variety of students drop out of secondary school. An obvious, clear picture of "a typical dropout" does not emerge. Dropouts in Minnesota represent a wide range of youth. Yet, within this population, some trends do appear.

- Eleventh grade is the peak year for dropping out of public school; twelfth grade and tenth grade also have a large number of dropouts. The number of dropouts from the ninth, eighth and seventh grades is substantially lower than in the upper three grades. Refer to Figure 3.

- The dropout rates for American Indians, Blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately high in Minnesota.

- On the basis of national studies, disproportionately high rates of dropouts are from families of low socioeconomic status and from parents with low educational attainment levels. However, in the pilot study only about one-fourth of the dropouts appear to be from economically disadvantaged families. It is not known whether incomplete information was collected regarding probable economic status of dropouts in the pilot study, or whether fewer Minnesota dropouts are from economically disadvantaged families than in the total United States.

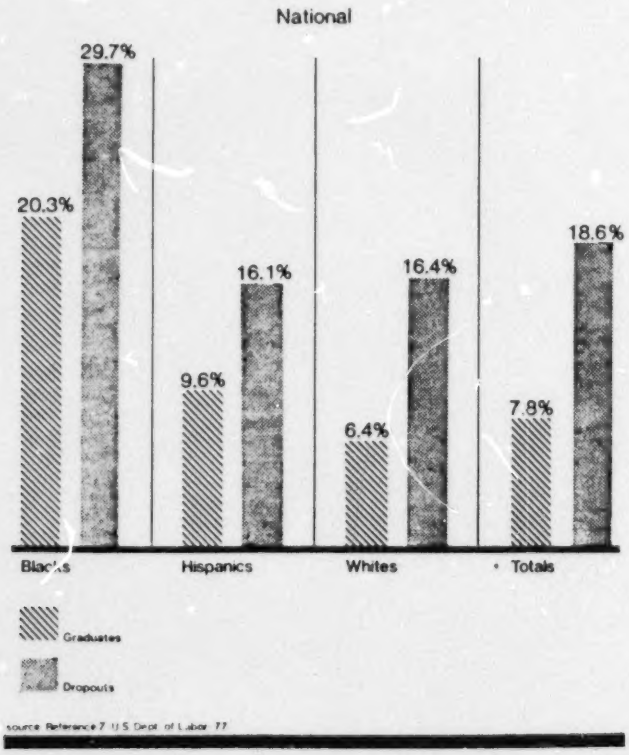
- Dropouts more often have lower occupational aspirations than their peers.

- Unemployment rates are very high among high school dropouts. Refer to Figure 4.

- Dropouts earn less future income than high school graduates. Refer to Figure 5.

Figure 4

Unemployment Rate Comparison, Ages 16-24 for 1978



source Reference 7 U.S. Dept. of Labor 77

- Reading levels, achievement levels and achievement motivation levels are all likely to be low for high school dropouts. Further, they tend to have been behind academically for several years. In the pilot study, dropouts scored poorly on standardized reading and mathematics tests, but scored about average on intelligence tests.

- While still in school, dropouts participated in extracurricular activities less often than other students.

- Dropouts tend to have had high levels of school absenteeism, school failure and grade retention. While in school, they also tend to be older than their classmates. In the pilot study schools, over four-fifths of the youth were absent more than 15 times during the school year in which they dropped out.

- Dropouts tend to view school negatively and to view leaving school in a positive way.

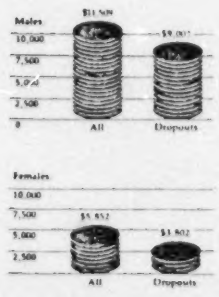
Figure 5

Salary Differentials : Annual Average Earnings Age 25-26

(Have not attended College)

National

1975-76



75-76 National Commission for Employment Policy Data

source Reference 1 : Vice President's Task Force 79

- School discipline and conduct problems have been correlated with dropping out in several studies. However, in the pilot study, school authorities reported that individual dropouts were not considered major discipline problems.

- According to research cited in the total report, dropout prone youth seem more likely than non-dropout prone youth to have experienced some form of trauma, including abuse and loss.

- Dropouts tend to have a low self-image and often lack a clear sense of identity.

- Dropouts are over-represented among persons who attempt suicide, self-mutilators, chemical users and abusers, delinquents and adolescent parents.

- In the pilot study, reasons given for dropping out often include lack of interest, personality/adjustment difficulties and educational problems.

Despite this listing, dropouts are individuals. No definite picture of a typical dropout emerges. But, by looking at trends and common problems of dropouts, programs can be planned to effectively serve both dropouts and potential dropouts.

Programs that Work

A variety of programs in Minnesota and elsewhere that serve the needs of dropouts have been examined. **Local programs** for secondary school dropouts frequently are the result of interagency efforts. While programs vary substantially, frequent characteristics of these programs for dropouts and potential dropouts have been identified.

Characteristics of successful programs for dropouts include:

- A personalized/individualized approach.
- Basic skills remediation.
- Preparation for employment.
- Support services and counseling.
- Paid work experience available through community employers and/or the employment/training system.
- Community-based learning experiences.
- Credit toward high school graduation for the various specialized program components.

In order to provide an effective program for dropouts, sponsoring agencies frequently:

- Have active support from agency administration.
- Utilize caring, skilled staff.
- Involve parent(s) and/or guardian.
- Offer late afternoon or evening time choice.
- Cosponsor program through education and employment/training systems.
- Develop linkages with other community agencies and organizations.
- Combine a variety of funding sources.

Securing adequate funding for programs to serve dropouts and potential dropouts is often a critical issue. However, a variety of funding sources does exist.

Education monies authorized at the federal, state and local levels have often supported dropout programs. Primary recurring education funding sources include state general education aid, local tax revenues, state/federal vocational aid and state/federal special education funds. Education grant funds are often provided on a short term basis for new programs which serve dropouts and potential dropouts. Secondary, post secondary and adult education dollars have all been used frequently.

Employment/training funds which are allocated for youth, as well as adult employment/training programs also have been tapped in many programs. Examples of such funds are Prime Sponsor CETA funds, state and federal discretionary CETA funds, Job Service, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Governor's Youth Program for Summer Employment.

Program funding is sometimes available from the criminal justice, health and welfare systems and the private sector. Common ways that private sector resources have helped to support specialized programs include community employers providing jobs for youth, business/industry offering contributions for programs and private foundation funding.

Successful dropout programs frequently blend funds from a variety of sources. This

is particularly necessary for planning and start-up costs because most ongoing funding is based on the number of participants served or on the programs in operation. Combining funds from several sources also enhances the likelihood of a comprehensive program with a multidisciplinary commitment. Likewise, the possibility of duplicating program components is decreased.

Several **statewide programs** and services have been developed. Resulting from legislation and/or state education agency activities, state programs reflect on of three approaches to meeting the needs of dropouts.

- Local education systems are responsible in Maine, Oregon, South Carolina and California for assessing the dropout problem in their communities and proposing/implementing local solutions. The Minnesota school district and regional planning laws which encourage planning for dropouts are a modification of this approach.

- Specialized programs for dropouts have been developed on a statewide basis in North Carolina and Washington. In North Carolina, CETA prime sponsors have been actively involved with this effort.

- Staff positions in Louisiana and Florida have been established in local school systems to provide outreach, referral, follow-up and other specialized services for dropouts and potential dropouts. A variation of this approach, a centralized dropout referral system, has been developed in North Dakota.

In addition, two **nationwide programs** have been examined in this study. Job Corps and Youth Incentive Entitlement are both sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Both combine work and occupational training with basic education for dropouts and potential dropouts.

Recommendations

Recommendations which follow relate to programs, funding, cooperation, and technical assistance. Program planners and policy makers at the community, state and federal levels, representatives of local education, employment/training, social service agencies and private sector employers may wish to note particularly the following **recommendations for local systems.** Legislators and representatives of state organizations, boards, agencies and advisory bodies should consider the **recommendations for state systems. Recommendations for federal systems** are aimed at Congress and federal agencies.

Programs

Local

Incorporate individual assessment as an ongoing component to discover personal learning styles and needs.

Evaluate individual progress to assure achievement toward entry and success in employment and/or transition into a post-secondary program.

Provide true alternatives to secondary school. Employment, simulated work experience and community-based activities can be used as learning experiences.

Develop both basic learning skills and employability competencies by providing a variety of experiences and services.

Provide individualized attention to serve personal learning styles and needs.

Provide remedial assistance and support services including counseling and guidance from a variety of agencies as early as possible to prevent getting behind in school and potentially dropping out; this could be as early as kindergarten and early elementary years.

Concentrate on improving self confidence and self esteem of dropouts and potential dropouts. Individual strengths should be identified and developed rather than emphasizing failures and weaknesses.

State

Focus upon preparation for success in the community as the goal of specialized programs for dropouts. Completion of secondary school should not be the primary goal.

Recognize survival skills development and support services as critical elements of programs for dropouts. Examples are assistance in personal adjustment, employability and course selection, and help with resolving difficulties in the areas of transportation, child care, finances, and health which could prevent success.

Award credit toward high school graduation for the various specialized program components.

Recognize the growing dropout problem and the difficulties involved in serving the diverse needs of dropouts.

Support interagency efforts at both the local and state levels to find effective solutions to the dropout problem.

Identify and work toward changing attitudes, practices and interpretation of regulations which serve as barriers to effectively meeting the needs of dropouts.

Prepare a plan which suggests one or more approaches to providing broad-based specialized programs for dropouts throughout Minnesota.

Funding

Local

Build a program for dropouts with a combination of funds from several systems. Be prepared to seek special grants from public or private sources for start-up funds to supplement recurring funds.

Combine appropriate funding sources to prevent duplication of program components. Observe funding source policies while serving all individuals who need a particular program component.

Provide paid employment opportunities for youth as an integral part of the program. Include private sector employers in the community and the employment/training system as job sources.

Inform and counsel dropouts about specific sources of stipends, grants, scholarships, and part-time job opportunities that are available to eligible individuals.

Offer dropouts an alternate time to attend school by scheduling late afternoon or evening classes to complement their work and family schedules.

Provide dropouts an opportunity to return to school on a part-time basis. Be prepared to seek part-time state foundation aid for these students.

State

Establish state policy that allows general and categorical secondary education aids to be used for youth over 21 who have returned to a specialized program for dropouts or to any secondary school.

Consider legislation which would provide "seed money" for start-up costs to initiate broad-based interagency programs for dropouts.

Minimize the restrictions on blending appropriate funds so that the use of combined funding sources will continue to be feasible and may become easier.

Coordinate reporting requirements among various state programs to avoid duplications of recordkeeping in local interagency programs; coordinate with federal program reporting whenever possible.

Examine the impact of declining enrollment aid on school districts with high dropout rates; compensate for the unintentional negative incentive this aid provides to efforts to retain potential dropouts and to the development of specialized programs.

Federal

Make federal policies flexible enough to allow local systems to serve those who need services most.

Modify federal regulations which serve as barriers to interagency cooperation so that programs and funds can be combined.

Coordinate reporting among federal social service programs to minimize duplication or recordkeeping in local interagency programs.

Include secondary school dropouts in population eligible for employment/training programs.

Cooperation

Local

Approach programming for dropouts as an interagency responsibility. Include the education, employment/training, judicial and welfare systems, other interested community agencies and the private sector.

Cooperate among several communities when necessary for cost effectiveness. Use special education cooperatives, secondary cooperative centers, educational cooperative service units, counties or other groups.

Assign someone representing each system to plan with the counterpart systems. This responsibility could be assigned to a person who is knowledgeable and concerned about locating and serving dropouts. Several agencies could share staff for this purpose.

Locate dropouts and identify their needs. Ask youth-serving community groups for assistance.

Establish mechanisms to share essential information about common clients among cooperating systems. Publish school district directory information about each student; establish a joint powers agreement or use other legal methods to share relevant information about dropouts and potential dropouts with other appropriate service systems within the constraints of the data privacy legislation.

Reduce duplication of effort and increase the effectiveness of combined services through the "youth services coordinator" concept. A caring, skilled adult "advocates" for both individual youth and the various social or legal agencies which serve them. This service is essential for youth with a variety of problems who want to learn how to manage their own lives.

Plan a program for those identified as potential participants. Include employment/training agency representatives and others who serve dropouts in the school system's Planning, Evaluating and Reporting (PER) process; likewise, include educators in the planning process for the employment/training system.

Jointly analyze and evaluate existing programs in communities with ongoing programs for dropouts and plan for improvement as needed.

Jointly plan for program delivery in communities without programs. First, use existing resources from the cooperating systems; then locate other necessary resources to provide a broad-based program which meets the comprehensive needs of dropouts.

State

Create a climate in which both state and local interagency cooperation is rewarded.

Develop cooperation among the state education, employment and training, criminal justice and welfare systems to provide services which promote and assist local interagency programs for dropouts.

Jointly identify key roles for each state system in providing services to planners and providers of local cosponsored programs.

Prepare and disseminate a directory of key personnel in various local agencies and organizations who can serve as contacts for those who wish to plan interagency programs for dropouts.

Examine privacy legislation and bills; promote provisions which will enhance the ability of public schools and other agencies that serve youth to share relevant student and dropout information.

Technical Assistance

Local

Designate one or more persons from within each local agency interested in serving dropouts to become knowledgeable of opportunities and methods for locating and serving dropouts. Several agencies could share staff for this purpose.

Share this information and provide assistance to the key representatives of the employment/training and education systems or other youth-serving agencies interested in offering an interagency dropout program.

State

Provide team-oriented assistance from the state employment/training, education, corrections, juvenile justice and welfare systems to facilitate cooperation at both the state and local levels. Focus on appropriate roles for each system to assure that varied expertise is made available for specialized dropout programs.

Continue to collect statewide data on dropouts according to race, sex and grade level; make this information available to state and local agencies that could use it in planning programs for the dropout population.

Provide training and workshops as needed for local personnel who are planning or operating specialized programs for dropouts.

Publicize programs which prepare dropouts for economic self-sufficiency and productive adulthood.

Additional Questions

The recommendations in this report were developed to give direction to future efforts in dropout prevention and programming. One additional purpose of this report is to encourage further consideration of the problem(s) of dropouts by raising some questions which were not directly addressed in this study.

- Should a concerted effort be made to decrease the dropout rate? What can be done to decrease the dropout rate if the reduction is helpful to youth?
- What priority should be placed on providing programs for dropouts in Minnesota? What is the cost to society for not providing them?
- How much would it cost to make programs available within commuting distance of each dropout? Could incentives help to get programs started?
- What informational services or technical assistance would be needed?
- What services are needed to increase the chances for secondary youth to succeed in self-supporting employment later? Are the needs of dropouts and nondropouts different?

References

The references in the Executive Summary are taken from the full report. Only three were referenced in the summary.

1. Summary Report. The Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1980, 20.

6. Information on Minnesota Students Not Graduating from High School, 1980 and 1981; Minnesota Public School Dropouts, by Grade and by School District, 1978-79 and 1979-1980. Education Statistics Section, Minnesota Department of Education, 1980-81.

7. Young, Ann McDougal, Special Labor Force Reports. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977, (223), 1.